

CONSUMER CONNECTION



MIND YOUR MEDICINE

MAKE SENSE OF YOUR RX + GET RID OF PILLS SAFELY

ALSO INSIDE: Your medical records + Fall home fix-ups + Smog Check tips

contents



2



7

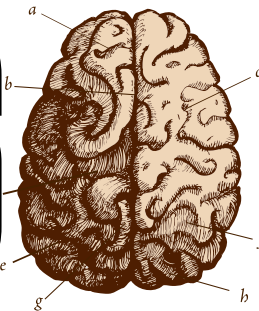


12

14



16



20



26

from the director

Fall letter **1**

drug labels get a makeover

Patient-oriented prescription labels will debut this fall **2**

lush lashes

What you should know about Latisse **6**

don't flush that pill

Safer ways to dispose of unwanted medication **7**

your medical records:

Do you know who owns them? **8**

consumer rights

More protections for credit card users **11**

smog check

What to do if your car fails **12**

senior driving

The road from driver to rider **14**

seniors and mental health

What to look for and where to find help **16**

home heating tips

Stay warm and save money **20**

speak up

Put the 'public' in public board meetings **24**

current scams

New schemes to watch out for **26**

need government info?

There's an app for that **28**

money smarts

Home mortgages **29**



CONSUMER CONNECTION

is produced by the Department of Consumer Affairs' Office of Publications, Design & Editing.
If you have any questions or comments, please e-mail us at consumerconnection@dca.ca.gov.



from the *acting director*

It's an ever-changing world we find ourselves in these days, but one thing remains the same: It takes constant effort to avoid scams, cons, schemes, and just plain bad choices. It takes a commitment to vigilance on your part, and a commitment to consumer protection on ours.

This magazine represents both. Our purpose, with this and every issue of *Consumer Connection*, is to offer news, resources, and information to help you make smart and safe decisions for yourself and your family. We hope you find it useful.

Here are the highlights of this issue:

How likely are you to take medication correctly if you don't understand the directions on the label? Not very, according to various studies. A major endeavor by the State Board of Pharmacy to standardize prescription bottle labels may help reduce medication errors. Among other requirements, the label will soon have to use specific wording to tell you how much of your medicine to take and when to take it.

If you're a proud owner of a smart phone, you know all about those little programs called "apps" (short for "applications"). State and Federal government entities have some pretty useful apps, too. We tell you what they do and where to find them.

Mental illness in seniors is often ignored or misdiagnosed, according to the Board of Behavioral Sciences. Review some common warning signs and decide if an evaluation from a licensed mental health professional could help an elderly person in your life.

Depending on where you live in our Golden State, it may cost you more to keep your house warm in the winter than cool in the summer. In either case, you'll want to be sure your home is as energy efficient as possible. We have tips on how to do a home energy audit yourself – or with professional help.

Finally, because we're committed to increasing the public's role in the decisions of our boards and bureaus, we have an article on how you can get involved. We tell you how to find opportunities for public participation and how to comment by mail, fax, or e-mail. We also tell you what to do if you want to speak to the board in person at a scheduled meeting. It's easy: Just show up.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brian J. Stiger".

BRIAN J. STIGER, Acting Director

California Department of Consumer Affairs

PRESCRIPTION DRUG LABELS

get a

makeover

Consumers may soon have an easier time reading the labels on their prescription bottles thanks to recent actions by the California State Board of Pharmacy. Under the new regulations adopted by the Board, pharmacies must print drug labels in 10-point type and must place key information (including the patient's name, the name of the drug and its strength, and the directions for use) on the label in a specific order. In addition, consumers can ask their pharmacy to print the label in the slightly larger 12-point font, and the pharmacy will have to comply.





The changes stem from a two-year effort by the Board to establish State standards for a “patient-centered” prescription label called for under Senate Bill 472 (Corbett, Chapter 470, Statutes of 2007), also known as the California Patient Medication Safety Act. A patient-centered label is designed to help reduce medication errors, which harm more than 1.5 million U.S. residents a year, according to the Institute of Medicine. Just under half of American adults cannot understand the label on their prescription medication, according to the Institute.

The issue of patient-centered drug labels generated considerable public attention for the Board of Pharmacy. Approximately 750 Californians participated in a Board-sponsored study of the issue. Some 60 percent of those surveyed said larger or bolder print would make labels easier to read. In addition, the Board received more than 1,000 letters on the topic, most of them advocating 12-point type on the label. Advocates for some chain pharmacies and retail outlets voiced their preference for 10-point type on the label.

In the end, the Board opted for a compromise. The Board members voted to mandate a 10-point label, unless a consumer specifically requests a larger-print version. If a larger point size is requested, 12-point type must be used.

The Board’s actions also help people with limited or no English proficiency understand the prescription label. The Board voted to require pharmacies to have written procedures in place to assist those consumers and to provide interpretive services “if interpretive services in such language are available.”

The new regulations are expected to take effect in early 2011. All pharmacies in the State (totaling more than 6,000) will have one year to comply. Samples of the new prescription bottle label will be posted on the Pharmacy Board’s Web site, www.pharmacy.ca.gov, later this year.

THE PATIENT-CENTERED PRESCRIPTION BOTTLE LABEL

At least half the label must contain the following items, in this order, in 10-point typeface:

Names

Name of the patient

Name of the drug (trade or generic) and strength of the drug

Directions for use

Purpose or condition (if provided by prescribing doctor)

Pharmacies can add other elements to the label in any font or size as long as they don’t interfere with the legibility of the required information.

Wording

The label also must use specific wording on the label.

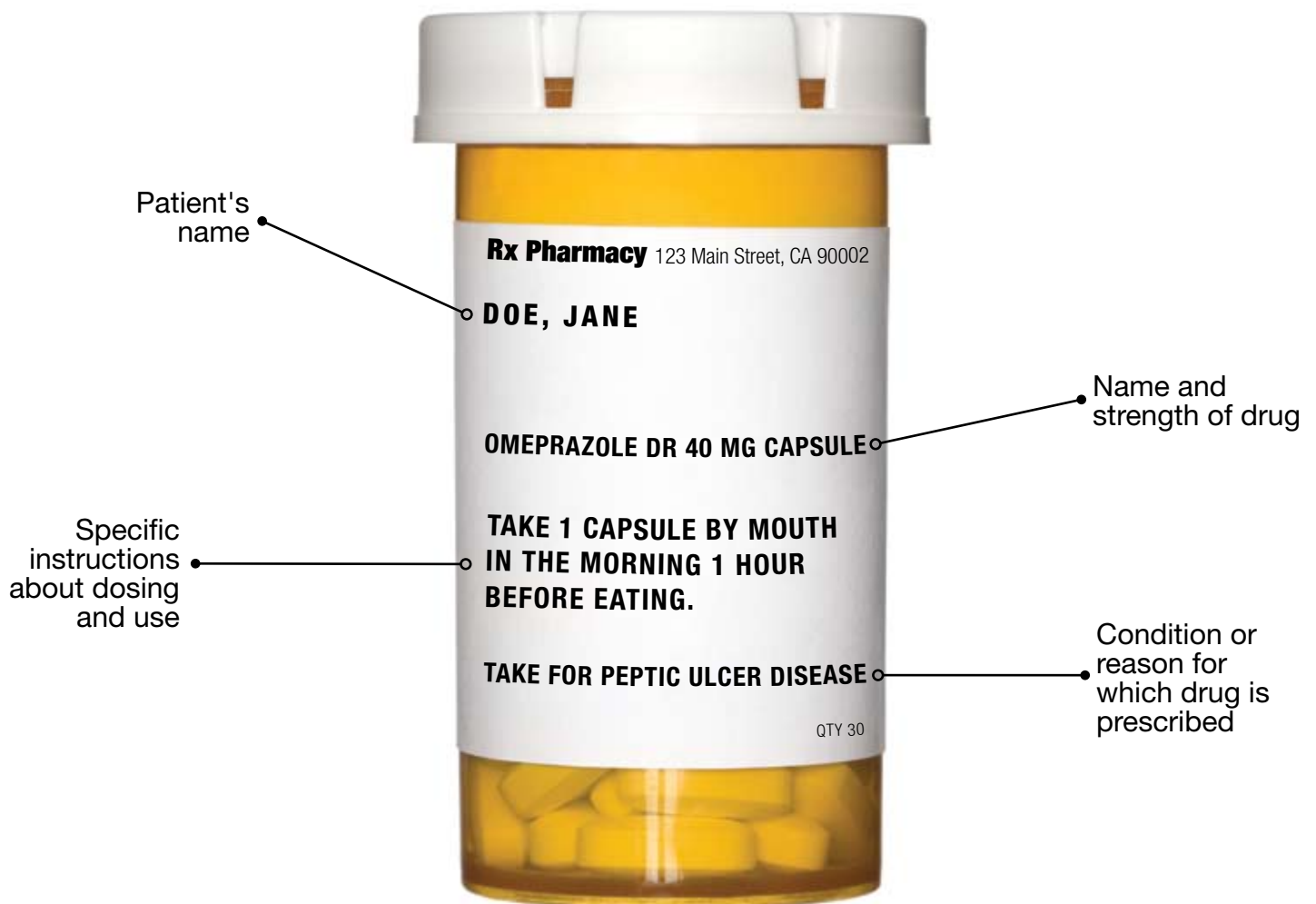
Here are some examples of the new wording:

Take 1 (tablet, capsule, caplet, or pill) at bedtime.

Take 2 (tablets, capsules, caplets, or pills) in the morning.

Take 1 (tablet, capsule, caplet, or pill) as needed for pain. Do not take more than 4 (tablets, capsules, caplets, or pills) a day.

ELEMENTS OF THE REVISED PRESCRIPTION LABEL





WANT LUSH
lashes?

WHAT YOU SHOULD
KNOW ABOUT
Latisse



You may have heard of Latisse, a product that's been heavily advertised in magazines and on television, with a celebrity touting its ability to give you long, thick lashes. While this may be true for some people, consumers should be aware that although it's possible to obtain Latisse by various means including over the Internet, it is a drug that can only legally be prescribed by a licensed medical physician, i.e., your doctor or ophthalmologist. Although many optometrists in California are receiving samples of the drug, they cannot legally prescribe it to their patients.

Latisse is a prescription treatment for hypotrichosis (thin or missing eyelashes) that increases their growth, length, thickness, and darkness. Although hypotrichosis is actually a medical condition, consumers are using the product for cosmetic reasons.

But if your goal is lush lashes, you should take note that, like any drug, Latisse can have side effects that should be thoroughly discussed with your doctor. It has, in fact, been associated with several risks, according to the Federal Drug Administration (FDA). According to the "warnings and precautions" section of its FDA-approved product labeling, those risks include darkening of skin around the eye and hair growth on other places on the face if excess solution runs onto cheeks or other skin surfaces.

The above risks, outlined in a warning letter dated September 10, 2009, from FDA officials to the makers of Latisse, underscore the need to get it only by prescription from your doctor. The letter can be found at www.fda.gov/downloads/Drugs/GuidanceComplianceRegulatoryInformation/EnforcementActivitiesbyFDA/WarningLettersandNoticeofViolationLetterstoPharmaceuticalCompanies/UCM182628.pdf.

DON'T FLUSH THAT PILL!

Safer ways to dispose of expired medicine

Did you know that 80 percent of U.S. streams contain trace amounts of human medicines? That's according to a fact sheet published by the California Board of Pharmacy and the University of California San Francisco's School of Pharmacy. Although flushing expired prescriptions and other unwanted medications down the toilet may seem like a safe and quick way to dispose of them, it actually sends them into the waterways, eventually polluting the environment.

Pharmaceuticals and personal care products, including prescription, over-the-counter and veterinary drugs; vitamins; fragrances; and cosmetics; are found in any water body influenced by raw or treated sewage, including rivers, streams, ground water, coastal marine environments, and many drinking water sources, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Sewage treatment systems cannot remove such products from water that is released into other water bodies, according to the California Board of Pharmacy. As a result, there is concern that it can harm fish and other aquatic life. For example, according to the EPA, profound effects on spawning and other behaviors in shellfish can occur when exposed to some antidepressants. For more information on the EPA's research, go to www.epa.gov/ppcp/work.html. In addition, studies by the U.S. Geological Survey have indicated that exposure to low-levels of some contaminants (including some pharmaceuticals) can cause disruption of endocrine functions such as reproduction in animals.

And think twice about throwing old pill bottles in your trash, too. These can become targets for drug abusers, who can get those containers refilled at some pharmacies using information on the label because identification is not



required for refills. Consult the Pharmacy Board's fact sheet for tips on tossing your old pill bottles properly. View it online at www.pharmacy.ca.gov/publications/dont_flush_meds.pdf.

The best way to dispose of most unwanted medications is to take them to your local household hazardous waste facility. (Check your phone directory, or go online to find your nearest household hazardous waste facility.) However, controlled substances such as Vicodin, Codeine, or Ambien should not be disposed of that way. For a list of controlled substances, visit the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency's Web site at www.deadiversion.usdoj.gov/schedules/orangebook/c_cs_alpha.pdf.

Your local police department may accept unwanted controlled substances on a regular basis. Call the non-emergency number to ask. Contact your city and county offices for more information, or go to www.dontflushyourmeds.com or www.calrecycle.ca.gov/PublicEd/Earth911.htm.

Another option is to ask your pharmacy if it will accept old medicines back from patients. In addition, members and partners of the National Community Pharmacists Association offer safe disposal of unwanted medications in local community pharmacies around the country. Check online at www.disposemyeds.org/index.php/pharmacy-locator to see if there's a participating pharmacy near you. Your pharmacy may also have a mail-back option.

You can also check the DEA site (www.dea.gov) for information on upcoming drug take-back events: State, Federal and local law enforcement officials establish drop-off points to collect unwanted controlled substances from consumers for safe disposal.

Take charge
of your
healthcare:
Know
your rights.

DO YOU
KNOW
WHO OWNS
YOUR
MEDICAL
RECORDS?





Ever wonder what happens to them if your doctor retires or closes up shop, or when your treatment is completed?

An incident in Stockton made headlines recently when a man bought the contents of a storage container in an auction. To his surprise, those contents included old dental records – loaded with names, Social Security numbers, and birth dates. Because health records contain sensitive personal information, they can be an attractive target for identity thieves.

According to California's Health and Safety Code, healthcare providers who close their practices temporarily or permanently are still responsible for patients' records. If they sell their practice, the transaction includes the active patient records and prescription files. Providers must retain a patient's records for a minimum of seven years from the date they complete treatment of the individual. The records of an unemancipated minor must be kept at least one year after he or she has turned 18, and in any case, not less than seven years. For more information on accessing your records, visit the Medical Board of California's Web site at www.mbc.ca.gov/consumer/access_records.html.

The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), passed by Congress in 1996, set additional protections for patients. According to the California Department of Health Care Services (DHCS), this law mandates industrywide standards for healthcare information on electronic billing and other processes, and requires the protection and confidential handling of protected health information.

The HIPAA privacy regulations require healthcare providers and organizations, as well as their business associates, to develop and follow procedures that ensure the confidentiality and security of protected health information when it is transferred, received, handled, or shared, on paper, orally, or electronically. Plus, only the minimum health information necessary to conduct business is to be used or shared. Ask your providers what their procedures are if you're concerned. You can find more information on HIPAA on the DHCS Web site (www.dhcs.ca.gov) under "Quick Links."

You always have the right to see and receive copies of all the records of your medical conditions and the treatment you received. If you want to see your medical files, submit a written request to your healthcare provider, and you will be allowed to review them during business hours within five working days. You may be asked to pay any reasonable clerical costs associated with gathering and making the records available. It's a similar process to obtain copies: Submit a written request specifying which records you want copied. The provider will let you know if there's a fee. The copies must be provided to you within 15 days.

If you decide to change physicians or healthcare organizations, it's a good idea to obtain copies of your medical records, according to the Privacy Rights Clearinghouse, a nonprofit consumer organization based in San Diego. It advises getting your medical records while you can—physicians may retire or move out of state, and healthcare providers can merge with others or go out of business. Don't count on your ability to get your records years after treatment.

But how do you get your medical records if your doctor moves, retires, or dies? This is trickier. There is no central "repository" for medical records. If a physician moves, retires, or dies, sometimes another physician will either "buy out" or take over the practice. The patients currently being seen are usually notified by mail as a courtesy, and told where to obtain their records. If you cannot locate the physician, you may want to contact your local county medical society (which is part of the California Medical Association) to see if it has any information about the physician's practice, such as who may have taken it over. For more information, visit the California Medical Association Web site at www.cmanet.org.

You can also contact the Medical Board of California's Consumer Information Unit at 800.633.2322, or search online using the "Check Your Doctor" tab to find the physician's address of record for his or her license. Write to the doctor at that address and request that a copy of your records be sent to you. If the address has a forwarding order on it, your letter will be forwarded to the doctor's new address. The doctor has 15 days from the time your letter is received to send you a copy of your records, if the records are still available.

If the doctor died and did not transfer the practice to someone else, you might have to check your local Probate Court to see whether the doctor has an executor for his or her estate. You could then contact the executor to see if you can get a copy of the records. Depending on how much time has passed, the person who was appointed as the custodian of records may have destroyed them.



MORE PROTECTIONS FOR CREDIT CARD USERS

The last part of a package of Federal reforms of credit card billing practices took effect on August 22, 2010. These new rules, which cover late payments and penalty fees, are part of the Credit Card Accountability Responsibility and Disclosure (CARD) Act enacted earlier this year.

Among other provisions, the new rules ban:

Late fees of more than \$25, except for repeated violations. What that means: Even if your minimum payment is higher than \$25, your late payment can't be higher than \$25.

Late fees that are higher than the amount owed. What that means: If your minimum payment is \$20, your late payment can't be higher than \$20.

Over-the-limit fees that are higher than the amount over the overage. What that means: If you exceed your credit limit by \$5, you cannot be charged a penalty of more than \$5.

The new rules also call for credit card companies to re-evaluate interest rate increases every six months and reduce your rate if the reason for the increase no longer applies. This provision is retroactive to January 2009, which means some consumers may be seeing an interest rate reduction.

Contact your credit card company and the following online resources for details:

Federal Reserve
www.federalreserve.gov

Consumer Action
www.consumer-action.org

SMOG CHECK:

A WARNING LIGHT COULD BLOW YOUR TEST



IF YOUR VEHICLE FAILS A SMOG CHECK,

THE CONSUMER ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

MAY BE ABLE TO HELP YOU.

IF YOU'RE ONE of the millions of Californians who own a car that's more than six years old, you're familiar with the Smog Check program. But, do you know how to help ensure your car passes the biennial test? The answer is simple: Keep your car in good running condition.

A car that gets the recommended regular maintenance is more likely to be operating properly and pass its Smog Check. Even small measures like regular oil changes, keeping your tires inflated and rotated, and making sure the gas cap is on tight, will help your car pass its Smog Check, which, in turn, reduces air pollution.

What if your car seems to be running fine, but the dashboard "check engine" light is on? The light could mean there is a problem with the car's emissions control system. If your car's dashboard is showing a light that says "check engine" or "service engine soon" or something similar, the Bureau of Automotive Repair advises you to take your car to a mechanic as soon as possible to avoid more serious problems. A car will not pass Smog Check if the check engine light is on.

If you're not sure whether your vehicle will pass Smog Check, you can ask a licensed Smog Check technician for a pre-inspection test. A pre-inspection test can find emissions-related problems, which will give you a chance to get the car fixed before the official Smog Check inspection. Be sure to get an estimate of the cost before you agree to the pre-inspection test. You can find an authorized Smog Check station or verify a station's license online at www.smogcheck.ca.gov. You can also call the Department of Consumer Affairs' Consumer Information Center at 800.952.5210 for information on the Smog Check program and licensed stations.

If your vehicle fails Smog Check, the Consumer Assistance Program (CAP) may be able to help you. The program has an option for vehicles that fail Smog Check:

- **REPAIR ASSISTANCE:** Qualified consumers can receive financial assistance to pay for the cost of emissions-related repairs. You could qualify based on your household family income. Or, you could qualify if your vehicle registration notice tells you to take the car to a Test-Only or Gold Shield station for Smog Check. If you qualify based on limited income, you'll have to pay \$20 toward the cost of repairs. If you qualify based on a Test-Only notice, your share will be \$100. The State will pay up to \$500 in either case.
- **VEHICLE RETIREMENT:** The Bureau of Automotive Repair's Consumer Assistance Program has expanded the vehicle retirement option to include off-cycle vehicles. That means eligible consumers may now retire their vehicle for \$1,000 at any time, for any reason. This program does not require a Smog Check failure.

Applications for the Consumer Assistance Program are available online at www.smogcheck.ca.gov. Call the Consumer Information Center at 800.952.5210 for more information or to have an application form mailed to you.

Several air quality management districts in California also operate vehicle retirement programs. Older vehicles that have passed Smog Check may be eligible for these programs. For a list of the programs, go online to the California Air Resources Board at www.arb.ca.gov/msprog/avrp/avrpeo.htm. Information is also available online at www.oldcarbuyback.com. You must be a resident of a specific county in California, and meet other requirements, to be eligible.

Vehicles retired under State or local programs are crushed by auto dismantlers.

SENIOR DRIVING➤

AS WE AGE, physical limitations, such as reduced vision, flexibility, strength, and cognitive function can take their toll on our ability to drive. To help seniors safely maintain mobility, the Board of Occupational Therapy joined with the Department of Motor Vehicles, the Office of Traffic Safety, and others to study and develop resources to promote safe driving for seniors. Here's a look at some of the resources available.

SELF-ADMINISTERED TESTS FOR DRIVERS

The results of a self-administered test can indicate whether any age-related health issues might affect your driving. Here are some of the tests available online:

- ◉ **Taking Control of Your Driving Future**
www.eldersafety.org.
- ◉ **AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety**
www.SeniorDrivers.org.
- ◉ **Senior Driver Self-Assessment**
www.dmv.ca.gov/about/senior/senior_top.htm.

DRIVER THERAPY

Seniors who have concerns about their driving ability may benefit by visiting an occupational therapist (OT) who is trained in driving assessment and evaluation. A trained OT can help seniors determine how health impairments and other limitations may be affecting their driving. OTs can also help mature drivers develop and implement a plan for how they can reduce their risks and stay safely mobile. The American Occupational Therapy

Association and the California Board of Occupational Therapy have information and links to driving programs and driving specialists in your area.

- ◉ **Board of Occupational Therapy**
www.bot.ca.gov.
- ◉ **American Occupational Therapy Association**
www.aota.org. Click on "driver safety."



CLASSES AND MATURE DRIVER IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMS

Driving training and refresher courses geared toward older drivers are offered at various locations in California. Here's how to find them:

- ◉ **DMV**
www.dmv.ca.gov. Click on "seniors" for a list of DMV-approved Mature Driver Improvement Program providers.
- ◉ **AARP**
www.AARP.org
888-AARP-Now or 888-227-7669.

DMV EXAM

DMV does not have different licensing standards for senior drivers. It is an individual's mental or physical condition and his or her ability to follow traffic laws that determine whether a license

is renewed, suspended, or revoked. However, a senior driver may be asked to take a driving test due to a physical or mental condition or lack of driving skill. The DMV Web site has a section devoted to senior drivers. There you will find information on local DMV driver safety offices, drivers license renewal, vision, written, and driving tests, restricted drivers licenses, DMV re-examinations, and how to appeal a DMV decision. The site also has contact information for the DMV's consumer ombudsman.

- ◉ **DMV**
www.dmv.ca.gov.

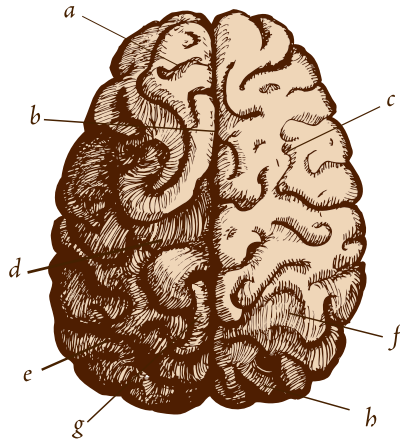
SURRENDERING A LICENSE

For those drivers who wish to give up their license due to affliction or impairment, the DMV site lists many alternative transportation resources that can keep them mobile. It can be difficult for some drivers to accept that an age-related disability has rendered them no longer able to drive safely. This is especially true when the disability has developed gradually. The following sites offer advice for seniors and their loved ones who are facing the decision to give up driving:

- ◉ **California Department of Aging**
www.aging.ca.gov.
- ◉ **AARP**
www.AARP.org.
- ◉ **DMV**
www.dmv.ca.gov. Click on "seniors."
- ◉ **AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety**
www.SeniorDrivers.org.

THE ROAD FROM DRIVER TO RIDER



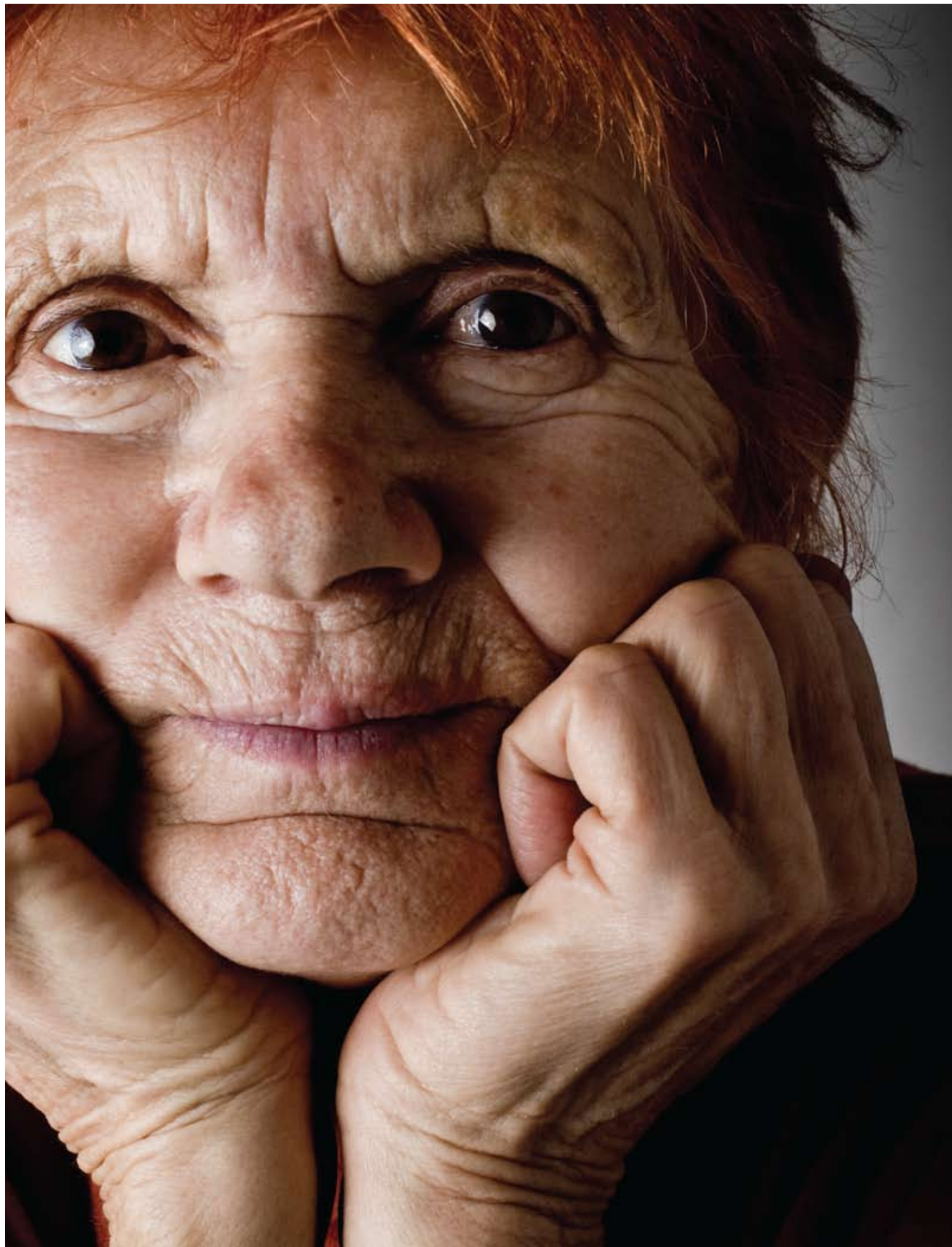


Seniors & Mental Health

WHAT TO LOOK FOR



WHERE TO FIND HELP



many of us will care for an older person at some time. The experience can be rewarding. It can also be demanding, especially when seniors become frustrated with mounting physical limitations, the loss of friends and family, and the many other stressors they face. It is common for them to express anger or sadness. But at what level should these emotions be considered signs of mental disorders?

The good news is that according to the National Institute of Mental Health, the rate of mental illness among Americans declines with age. Looking at all types of mental illness, the majority, 43.8 percent, occurs in the 18- to 29-year-old age group. Only 15.5 percent of all mental illness is found in the group that is age 60 or older. The elderly do face an increased risk for substance abuse, anxiety, depression, and suicide, however. They are also the demographic most susceptible to the many types of dementia (including Alzheimer's). Dementias are conditions that limit the brain's ability to process and retain information.

Diagnosing dementia or mental illness is a complex task even for doctors and may require many examinations and tests. That means trying to make a diagnosis on your own could be misleading or harmful.

According to the Department of Consumer Affairs' Board of Behavioral Sciences (BBS), the best way to help your loved ones is to provide their primary care doctor with good information—a careful record of daily observation. How is their sight, hearing, speech? Are they eating balanced meals regularly and staying adequately hydrated? Are they getting regular exercise and socializing with friends? How is their mood? Sleep? Are they taking required medications regularly?

If they have physical complaints, are these being adequately treated? Also, be alert to what they do not complain about. People are often ashamed of the infirmities of age and will attempt to hide them. They may fear abandonment. Reassure them frequently, and be vigilant. Your careful observation



may uncover a serious and treatable condition that might otherwise remain undiscovered.

If the person you are caring for is having memory problems, keep a discreet, written record. Especially look for a progression. Has your life-long crossword solver suddenly given up the pastime? Does the person forget the names of common objects or the names of old friends? Any of these changes may be caused by a wide variety of conditions which include medication side effects, diabetes, dementia, severe depression, and more. Again, the best thing you can do is keep a good record. Of course for any sudden condition, such as a stroke, you should call 911 immediately.

PRIMARY CARE PHYSICIAN

This is often the first medical professional to approach with your concerns. Visit the Department of Consumer Affairs' Medical Board of California at www.mbc.ca.gov. The site has useful links and allows you to look up a physician's license and qualifications.

PSYCHOLOGIST

If your primary care physician suspects mental illness or cognitive (thinking) impairment, the doctor may refer you to a psychologist. This profession is regulated by DCA's Board of Psychology. The Board's Web site at www.psychboard.ca.gov provides links to resources as well as a database where you can look up a psychologist's license.

LICENSED CLINICAL SOCIAL WORKER (LCSW) MARRIAGE AND FAMILY THERAPIST (MFT)

Caring for an older person is difficult, especially over time. Both you and the person you care for will require advice, support, information, and resources. A social worker or therapist can supply these. Both are licensed by the DCA's Board of Behavioral Sciences (BBS). The BBS Web site, www.bbs.ca.gov, allows you to check licenses and has links and resources.



*“Leave
diagnostics
to a
professional—
trying to make
a diagnosis
on your own
could be
misleading
or harmful „*

Additional Resources

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF AGING

The Department provides tools and tips for consumers and caregivers and links to local Area Agencies on Aging. The Department also initiated Network of Care, a program in each of California's counties that coordinates community and local programs to assist seniors. This comprehensive, Internet-based resource is for the elderly and people with disabilities, as well as their caregivers and service providers. Go online to www.aging.ca.gov or call 800.510.2020 for assistance.

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF MANAGED HEALTH CARE

The Department regulates Health Maintenance Organizations (HMOs) and, along with the California Office of the Patient Advocate, helps to inform and educate consumers about their healthcare rights and responsibilities. Find help online at www.hmohelp.ca.gov and www.opa.ca.gov or by calling 888.466.2219.

POSITIVE AGING RESOURCE CENTER

The Positive Aging Resource Center, (PARC), provides information and resources for older adults and their caregivers. Visit its Web site at www.positiveaging.org.



5 ways to
SAVE MONEY
&
STAY WARM
this winter



ALTHOUGH IT'S HARD to think about winter with summer's swelter still lingering in some parts of California, now is a great time to weatherize your home before your furnace and fireplace must spring into action.



Keeping cold air out and warm air in as effectively as possible is key to saving energy and money during the winter. There are resources out there to help you learn where you might be able to improve your home's energy efficiency. Here are five suggestions for keeping out the cold while saving money:

1. GET AN ENERGY AUDIT

A home energy audit can help you identify ways to save up to hundreds of dollars a year on home heating (and cooling). Ask your electric or gas utility if it audits homes for free or for a reasonable charge. If not, ask for a referral to a qualified professional.

Another way to evaluate your home's energy efficiency is by using an online evaluation tool. One option is the Energy Star Home Energy Yardstick, which lets you compare your usage to other households around the nation and get tips for improvement. Visit www.energystar.gov and select the "Home Improvement" tab.

The results from these online assessment tools will give you a place to start your energy makeover.

2. MAKE THE CHANGES

Regardless of what energy audit tool you use, what you learn from it won't do you any good unless you implement it. Some energy improvements with big payoffs are easy to do yourself, such as caulking your windows and installing weather-stripping around doors. Professional insulation contractors who are licensed by the Contractors State License Board (CSLB) can also install these materials. Contact the CSLB at 800.321.CSLB for more information.

Another easy DIY energy-saving project is putting up thermal window coverings, which are available almost anywhere draperies are sold. Using drapes or blinds and opening them during sunlight hours to let the sun's rays in where appropriate can take some load off your heating system.

Low-income consumers may also be able to take advantage of free weather-proofing services, such as attic insulation, from their local utility company. Check your bill or consult your phone directory for your company's phone number or Web site.

BY THE NUMBERS

\$19 per month

Amount by which you could reduce your utility bills in a moderate climate by replacing old windows with new, high-performance dual pane windows in a 1,500-square-foot, single-story house.



How much you save depends on your area and what you decide to do. Here are some examples:

- ③ Replace old windows with new, high-performance dual pane windows. In a climate like Sacramento's, this could save you \$19 per month in utility costs for a 1,500-square-foot, single-story house.
- ③ Set the thermostat at 68 degrees or lower, health permitting: 3 to 5 percent more energy is used for each degree it's set above 68 degrees.
- ③ Appropriate insulation can reduce your heating costs up to 30 percent, according to Pacific Gas & Electric Company (PG&E). Talk to a contractor about insulating your attic, exterior walls, floors, and crawl spaces. Find more tips at the PG&E Web site at www.pge.com/myhome/saveenergymoney/savingtips/seasonaltips/winter.

If you decide to seek professional help for your home improvement, before hiring any contractors who say their are licensed, verify their information—including license, workers' compensation insurance and bond status—by visiting CSLB's Web site www.cslb.ca.gov or by calling 800.321.CSLB or 800.321.2752. Remember that contractors who perform work priced at \$500 or more (including labor and materials) must be

licensed by the CSLB. Heater maintenance or replacement usually falls under this requirement, as well as duct cleaning, caulking and weather-stripping windows and doors, installing storm windows, and roof repair or replacement.

By law, if you hire a roofing contractor, everyone must have workers' compensation insurance, including the "sole owner" contractor. All other contractors must have workers' compensation for their employees, but don't need to carry it for themselves, so ask these contractors if they carry their own surety insurance. Otherwise, you might be sued if a worker is injured on your property (the contractor would go after your homeowners insurance). Ask to see a copy of the license, bond, and insurance information before work begins.

3. FIND A REPUTABLE CHIMNEY SWEEP

For some households, the onset of winter means warm, glowing fires. An annual chimney cleaning and inspection can help prevent flames and sparks from getting where you don't want them, as well as keep you from getting carbon monoxide poisoning, according to the Chimney Safety Institute of America (CSIA). This nonprofit, educational organization recommends that people consider a CSIA-Certified Chimney Sweep because these individuals have passed an intensive examination based on fire codes, clearances, and standards for the construction and maintenance of chimneys and venting systems.

68 degrees

or lower. Temperature at which to set your thermostat in the winter. You use 3 to 5 percent more energy for each degree the furnace is set above 68 degrees.



30 percent

Amount by which you could reduce your heating costs by using proper insulation throughout your house.



The organization also recommends that consumers ask the following questions to ensure that the person hired is reputable:

- ⊗ How long has the chimney sweeping company been in business?
- ⊗ Does the company offer current references?
- ⊗ Does the company have unresolved complaints filed with the Better Business Bureau?
- ⊗ Does the company or individual carry a valid business liability insurance policy to protect your home and furnishings against accidents?

Ask neighbors, friends and family for referrals, and check the company's status with your local Better Business Bureau (www.bbb.org) before you make a decision on hiring a chimney sweep.

Keep in mind that a chimney sweep who only does cleaning does not need a State contractor's license. However, if there are structural concerns such as loose bricks or mortar in the chimney or fireplace, or draft problems, a general building contractor should be contacted; if there are brick or stone-related problems, a masonry contractor is the person to call; or if there are problems with the flue system, a sheet metal contractor would need to assess the repair. Contact the CSLB for specifics on various types of contractors.

If you want more effective heating along with fireplace ambience, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency recommends wood stoves and pellet stoves, and offers suggestions on which

ones to buy at www.epa.gov/burnwise/appliances.html. Be sure to follow local laws regarding fireplaces or stoves, including burning restrictions. To find out if it is a permissive burn day in your area, contact your local air pollution control district. To find contact information for your local air pollution control district, check your phone directory or visit the California Air Resources Board Web site, www.arb.ca.gov.

4. HAVE YOUR FURNACE TUNED UP

Proper maintenance of your heating system performed by a qualified heating, ventilating, and air-conditioning (HVAC) contractor is one of the most important steps you can take to prevent future problems, according to Energy Star, a joint program of the EPA and the U.S. Department of Energy. A cleaned, lubricated, and properly adjusted furnace runs more efficiently and uses less energy.

Contractors get busy during summer and winter months, so plan the checkups around the beginning and end of daylight-saving time each spring and fall. Ask your HVAC contractor for his or her CSLB pocket license and be sure to verify the license information on CSLB's Web site.

5. TAP YOUR RESOURCES

There are many Web sites dedicated to educating consumers on ways to save energy. Start by downloading *A Guide to Energy-Efficient Heating and Cooling* from www.energystar.gov. Check your local utility companies' Web sites, and visit Flex Your Power (www.fypower.org)—California's statewide energy efficiency marketing and outreach campaign—for more ways to save. Also read CSLB's free publication, *What You Should Know Before Hiring a Contractor* at www.cslb.ca.gov.

If you use a solar energy system or you're thinking about making the change to solar power, visit the California Energy Commission's Web site at www.gosolarcalifornia.com. Be aware that only certain State-licensed contractors are authorized to work on solar energy systems.

RESOURCES

Pacific Gas & Electric

www.pge.com/myhome/saveenergymoney/analyzer/en/

Southern California Edison

www.sce.com/_Tools/Residential/HomeEnergySurvey.htm

Southern California Gas

www.socalgas.com/residential/energysurvey/index.html

San Diego Gas & Electric

<https://energyaudit-sdge.sempa.com/usermanager/validateAccount.asp>

U.S. Department of Energy

www.energysavers.gov

The results from these online assessment tools will give you a place to start your energy makeover.

Local income-based energy efficiency programs

Flex Your Power

www.fypower.org/feature/lowincome/lowincome_programs.html

California Public Utilities Commission

www.cpuc.ca.gov/puc/cec/d_lowerbill.htm

HOME STAR

Proposed new legislation, more popularly known as "Cash for Caulkers," which would grant homeowners rebates for energy-efficient improvements. Already passed by the U. S. House of Representatives, it is now under consideration by the Senate.





PUT THE 'PUBLIC' IN PUBLIC BOARD MEETINGS

Twenty-three regulatory boards, most of them in healthcare, are part of the Department of Consumer Affairs (DCA). The boards protect public health and safety through licensing and oversight of the professions they represent. DCA provides administrative services, but the boards run these licensing entities. And they conduct their business (with a few exceptions) in public.

If you're a professional who is licensed by one of these boards, you have a vested interest in its activities. However, consumers have a stake in board business, too. Board actions affect not only license holders, but also the people who are customers or patients of those license holders. Board members make decisions on policies and on disciplinary actions against licensed professionals who violate State consumer protection laws. Board members also approve regulations and help guide licensing, enforcement, public education, and consumer protection activities.

If you're interested in a specific board, you can find details on when and where it meets by visiting its Web site (see next page). If you sign up for e-mail alerts on the Web site, you will be notified when meetings are scheduled. Agendas are posted online about two weeks in advance, and the meeting materials, which include studies, reports, letters, and other documents are also available online before the meeting. All public documents presented to a board must be available to the public, too. Board Web sites also include links to pending legislation and regulatory changes and other opportunities for public participation. You can attend a meeting in person. You can also submit written comments by

letter, fax, or e-mail. A webcast of the meeting may be available. Go online to www.dca.ca.gov/publications/multimedia/webcast.shtml for more information or to view a webcast.

For a list of upcoming meetings of all DCA entities, go online to www.dca.ca.gov. Click on "public meetings" on the left side of the page. Attending a board meeting is as simple as showing up at the designated time and place. You may be asked to sign in, but providing your name is voluntary under State law.

If you wish to speak to the board members during the meeting, you will be asked to identify yourself. Your name and your comments (verbal or written) will become part of the board's official records. You will probably be limited on how long you can speak.

The boards range in size from seven to 15 members. All of them include members who represent the industry they oversee and members who represent the public. The Governor appoints many board members, but the Senate Rules Committee and the Speaker of the Assembly also make appointments. Terms are generally four years, with the possibility of being reappointed for another term. DCA board members do not earn a salary for their service, although they receive some payment for attending meetings and for travel expenses.

If you want to know who's on a specific board (and who appointed them), you can find that information online at www.dcaboardmembers.ca.gov. Click on the member roster on the left side of the page. The listing includes the name of each board member, who appointed the person, the length of the term, and whether the person represents the public, the industry, license holders, or another group.



DCA BOARDS AND THEIR MEMBERSHIP

California Board of Accountancy

www.dca.ca.gov/cba

15 members (7 licensees | 8 public)

Governor appoints:

7 licensees | 4 public members

Senate Rules Committee appoints:

2 public members

Speaker of the Assembly appoints:

2 public members

Acupuncture Board

www.acupuncture.ca.gov

7 members (3 licensees | 4 public)

Governor appoints: 3 licensees | 2 public

Senate Rules Committee appoints: 1 public

Speaker of the Assembly appoints: 1 public

Board of Barbering and Cosmetology

www.barbercosmo.ca.gov

9 members (4 licensees | 5 public)

Governor appoints: 4 licensees | 3 public

Senate Rules Committee appoints: 1 public

Speaker of the Assembly appoints: 1 public

Board of Behavioral Sciences

www.bbs.ca.gov

12 members (5 licensees | 7 public)

Governor appoints: 5 licensees | 5 public

Senate Rules Committee appoints: 1 public

Speaker of the Assembly appoints: 1 public

California Architects Board

www.cab.ca.gov

10 members (5 licensees | 5 public)

Governor appoints: 5 licensees | 3 public

Senate Rules Committee appoints: 1 public

Speaker of the Assembly appoints: 1 public

California Board of Occupational Therapy

www.bot.ca.gov

7 members (3 public | 4 licensees)

Governor appoints: 1 public | 4 licensees

Senate Rules Committee appoints: 1 public

Speaker of the Assembly appoints: 1 public

California State Board of Optometry

www.optometry.ca.gov

11 board members (6 licensees | 5 public)

Governor appoints: 6 licensees | 3 public

Senate Rules Committee appoints: 1 public

Speaker of the Assembly appoints: 1 public

California State Board of Pharmacy

www.pharmacy.ca.gov

13 members (7 licensed pharmacists | 6 public)

Governor appoints: 7 pharmacists | 4 public

Senate Rules Committee appoints: 1 public

Speaker of the Assembly appoints: 1 public

Contractors State License Board

www.cslb.ca.gov

15 members (5 licensees | 1 labor

representative | 1 building official | 8 public)

Governor appoints: 5 licensees | 1 labor

representative | 1 building official | 4 public

Senate Rules Committee appoints: 2 public

Speaker of the Assembly appoints: 2 public

Court Reporters Board

www.courtreportersboard.ca.gov

5 members (2 licensees | 3 public)

Governor appoints: 2 licensees | 1 public

Senate Rules Committee appoints: 1 public

Speaker of the Assembly appoints: 1 public

Dental Board of California

www.dbc.ca.gov

14 members (10 licensees | 4 public)

Governor appoints: 10 licensees | 2 public

Senate Rules Committee appoints: 1 public

Speaker of the Assembly appoints: 1 public

Board for Professional Engineers and Land Surveyors

www.pels.ca.gov

13 members (6 licensees; 7 public)

Governor appoints: 6 licensees | 5 public

Senate Rules Committee: 1 public

Speaker of the Assembly: 1 public

Board of Guide Dogs for the Blind

www.guidedogboard.ca.gov

7 members (2 guide dog users | 1 representative

from Department of Rehabilitation | 4 public)

Governor appoints: all 7

Medical Board of California

www.mbc.ca.gov

15 members (8 doctor | 7 public)

Governor appoints: 8 doctors | 5 public

Senate Rules Committee appoints: 1 public

Speaker of the Assembly appoints: 1 public

Osteopathic Medical Board of California

www.ombc.ca.gov

9 board members (5 licensees | 2

naturopathic doctors | 2 public members)

Governor appoints: all 9

Physical Therapy Board of California

www.ptbc.ca.gov

7 members (4 licensees | 3 public)

Governor appoints: 4 licensees | 1 public

Senate Rules Committee appoints: 1 public

Speaker of the Assembly appoints: 1 public

California Board of Podiatric Medicine

www.bpm.ca.gov

7 members (4 licensees | 3 public)

Governor appoints: 4 licensees | 1 public

Senate Rules Committee appoints: 1 public

Speaker of the Assembly appoints: 1 public

California Board of Psychology

www.psychboard.ca.gov

9 members (5 licensees | 4 public)

Governor appoints: 5 licensees | 2 public

Senate Rules Committee appoints: 1 public

Speaker of the Assembly appoints: 1 public

Board of Registered Nursing

www.rn.ca.gov

9 members (5 licensees | 4 public)

Governor appoints: 5 licensees | 2 public

Senate Rules Committee appoints: 1 public

Speaker of the Assembly appoints: 1 public

Respiratory Care Board of California

www.rcb.ca.gov

9 members (1 doctor | 4 licensees | 4 public)

Governor appoints: 1 licensee | 2 public

Senate Rules Committee appoints:

1 doctor | 1 licensee | 1 public

Speaker of the Assembly appoints:

2 licensees | 1 public

Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology and Hearing Aid Dispensers Board

www.speechandhearing.ca.gov

9 members (6 licensees | 1 doctor | 2 public)

Governor appoints: 6 licensees | 1 doctor

Senate Rules Committee appoints: 1 public

Speaker of the Assembly appoints: 1 public

Veterinary Medical Board

www.vmb.ca.gov

7 members (4 licensees | 3 public)

Governor appoints: 4 licensees | 1 public

Senate Rules Committee appoints: 1 public

Speaker of the Assembly appoints: 1 public

Board of Vocational Nursing and Psychiatric Technicians

www.bvnpt.ca.gov

11 members (5 licensees | 6 public)

Governor appoints: 5 licensees | 4 public

Senate Rules Committee appoints: 1 public

Speaker of the Assembly appoints: 1 public



HOW TO JOIN A DCA BOARD

If you're interested in becoming a member of a board, bureau, or advisory committee for the Department of Consumer Affairs, the first step is to submit an application. Information on applications and where to submit them is available at www.dcaboardmembers.ca.gov/appointment/index.shtml.

ROUNDUP OF CURRENT SCAMS



A SLICK INVESTMENT?

The recent oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico has attracted fraudulent investment schemes. Some companies that provide services or products related to the disaster are selling shares called “pump and dump” stock. This type of scheme is nothing new and was common during the recovery from Hurricane Katrina.

It begins when a company attempts to increase the value of its stock by making extreme claims of its ability to help solve a current crisis, such as the Gulf of Mexico oil spill. As investors buy stock in these companies, it drives the price upward. Company officials then cash out their shares and leave investors holding overinflated stock that is probably going to lose value.

To avoid getting caught in one of these schemes, here are some suggestions:

- ❖ Never rely solely on unsolicited investment information from an e-mail, fax, or text message, especially when the sender makes extravagant claims about its future value.
- ❖ Be sure to check the source of the message, because many come from company insiders who are paid to advertise the stock. Most companies file quarterly and annual SEC (Securities and Exchange Commission) reports that can be found at www.sec.gov.
- ❖ The bottom line is to remain skeptical whenever you receive a stock tip, especially on the Internet. Always do your own research before you invest to avoid ending up in a slick investment scam that could pollute your financial future.

WHAT IS A ‘PONZI’ SCHEME?

A Ponzi scheme is a type of investment fraud that promises above-average returns not seen in traditional investment opportunities. It’s made to appear legitimate when dividends are paid to initial investors from the funds of subsequent investors. This is possible because the money was never invested. The scheme eventually falls apart after the operator runs out of money to pay clients from what they claim are investment dividends.

Although Charles Ponzi ran the first financial scheme like this in the 1920s, another man was responsible for bringing this type of swindle into the current spotlight. In December of 2007, Bernie Madoff was arrested after his Ponzi scheme collapsed, leaving many investors with substantial losses. Although he attracted many millionaires into his scheme, it can happen to anyone. Here’s how to protect yourself from schemes like these.

- ❖ The first red flag is a promise of a return on your investment up to 50 percent. If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.
- ❖ Before getting involved with any investment organization, be sure to research the individual or investment company.
- ❖ Ask lots of questions and get direct referrals from current clients.
- ❖ Get the type of information that proves you can trust an individual or investment company.



Don’t be impulsive when it comes to making investment decisions. Consider dealing with investment organizations that have been around for a long time or have a reliable and trustworthy history. The chances are very slim the government will rescue you from the consequences of making a bad investment choice.

CHOOSING A CHARITY



One of our biggest concerns when choosing a charity is knowing how our money donation is being used. Some charities spend a significant amount of donations just to put on more fund-raisers. Some pay very high salaries to administrators and have fancy corporate offices. This reduces the total amount of money that goes directly to the cause they serve.

Charity Navigator provides information on specific charitable organizations including: fund-raising efficiency rate; program/administrative spending ratios; revenue/expense statements; salaries of top administrators; and an overall rating. Reviewing the information can help you decide if the charity will make good use of your dollars. Go online to www.charitynavigator.org.

VACATION SCAM—QUICK TIPS

Thinking about taking a vacation or flying somewhere soon? Be wary of a “great deal” because there are many scams out there on airline tickets, vacation home rentals, timeshares, and vacation packages. The biggest red flag is when payment is requested using a wire transfer service like Green Dot MoneyPak,

Western Union, or MoneyGram. It's difficult to track these types of money transfers, making it almost impossible to get a refund. Always pay by credit card, so that fraudulent charges can be disputed.

Today, most airline tickets are issued electronically. If you make a purchase online and pay using a wire transfer service you could end up receiving a counterfeit e-ticket or none at all. Vacation home rental ads posted online may use the same scam. They list a vacation home for rent, often with fake photos and require a deposit using a wire transfer company. Timeshare properties are similar when the victim receives information in the mail or through the Internet. After investing, many discover the company has gone out of business. Finally, many companies offer a "valuable free gift" by simply paying a fee for processing and delivery. If the gift arrives at all, its value is significantly less than advertised.

It always pays to ask lots of questions and to do additional research before opening your wallet to these companies. Never pay



for anything using a wire transfer. Don't hesitate to check out the company with the Better Business Bureau and consider hiring an attorney to review your contract, especially on expensive purchases such as timeshares.

CLEANING OUT YOUR AIR DUCTS—OR YOUR CHECKBOOK?

You've probably seen the newspaper ads and flyers in your mailbox. They include scary warnings about filthy air ducts in



your home's heating and air conditioning system, forcing your family to breathe dirty air and face exposure to black mold. The scam begins with a low-cost air duct inspection or cleaning. It often leads to a dishonest company reporting your air ducts are filthy or contaminated with black mold. The firm's solution is installation of an ultraviolet light to kill the black mold at a cost around \$500. Others may suggest a complete furnace or air duct cleaning at a cost around \$400 in addition to expensive air filter replacement that may cost you up to \$125.

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, most air duct cleaning is unnecessary. It's common for dusty air to get trapped in the grate. Dust on the grate is not an indicator that your air ducts are contaminated. If air returns are clogged with dirt or dust, you can vacuum them off easily and install new air filters purchased at any home improvement or hardware store for a few dollars.

Be careful of companies that try to sell you services that are most likely unnecessary. Many arrive in unmarked vehicles and don't wear a company uniform. They often use high-pressure sales techniques to scare or intimidate homeowners to act now. Some even leave without providing a receipt of work performed. Spending between \$30 and \$75 for air duct cleaning and filter replacement is acceptable. When they try to sell you services costing hundreds or even up to a thousand dollars, it's probably a scam.



CYBERSQUATTING

Imagine this increasingly common scenario: The designer jacket you ordered online finally arrives. After excitedly opening the package and inspecting your purchase, you realize in horror that you are not wearing a designer coat, but rather a cheap knockoff. If you returned to the Web site from which you made your purchase, you would find that it too was a knockoff, albeit a very good one.

The practice of duplicating legitimate Web sites is called cybersquatting. At first glance everything looks great, especially the prices. Unsuspectingly, you place an order expecting to receive the name brand product, but end up getting much less. It's often difficult getting a refund because these fake Web sites rarely have a live person to talk to. Calling your credit card company may be the only recourse.

Here are some steps you should take to help identify a legitimate Web site selling brand name products. First, read the domain name carefully as it may be spelled slightly different than the legitimate site. Check to see if the domain name ends in .com, .org, or .net. Domain names ending in .cn (China) or .mn (Mongolia) are likely to be cybersquatting sites. Also, avoid Web sites that don't post a phone number. If they do, call first and talk to a live person to make sure it's real.

Bottom line, don't act impulsively. Use an Internet search engine like Google or Bing to help find the real Web site. After you find a site that appears real, call. A little time spent before making a purchase could save you both time and money.



Need government info? There's **an app** for that

If you're using your phone to get driving directions, movie times, and restaurant reviews, you're getting lots of useful tips, but you're probably missing a few big resources—from State and Federal government.

In addition to applications, many popular State and Federal Web sites have mobile friendly versions of their Web sites, with easy access to some of the most-requested information. Here's a look at some of the applications now available for smart phones or mobile wireless devices from State and Federal government offices:

State government

Mobile Web sites:

To access the list, type "CA.gov" in your mobile Web browser. To download apps or find out more, visit www.ca.gov/Apps.html.

- ❖ **California School Finder:** (California Department of Education) locations of K-12 schools, test scores, number of students, dropout rates, and other data.
- ❖ **Current traffic conditions:** (California Highway Patrol) 24-hour, real-time updates on collisions, traffic hazards, and lane obstructions.
- ❖ **Fishing locations:** (Department of Fish and Game) information and maps for more than 1,500 fishing spots across the State, fish planting schedule, and a listing of the 1,600 places around the State that sell fishing licenses.
- ❖ **Hospitals and long-term care facilities:** (California Department of Public Health) locations of more than 500 hospitals and 2,500 long-term care facilities in the State.
- ❖ **Jobs:** (Employment Development Department) job training, EDD offices.
- ❖ **Lottery:** (California Lottery) winning numbers, games and more.
- ❖ **Smog Check:** (Bureau of Automotive Repair) information and locations of stations.

- ❖ **State colleges and universities:** (California Postsecondary Education Commission) enrollment data, reports, and other information on more than 450 California colleges.

- ❖ **State Parks:** (California State Parks) find a State park, check out its features, reserve a campsite, and more.

Apps:

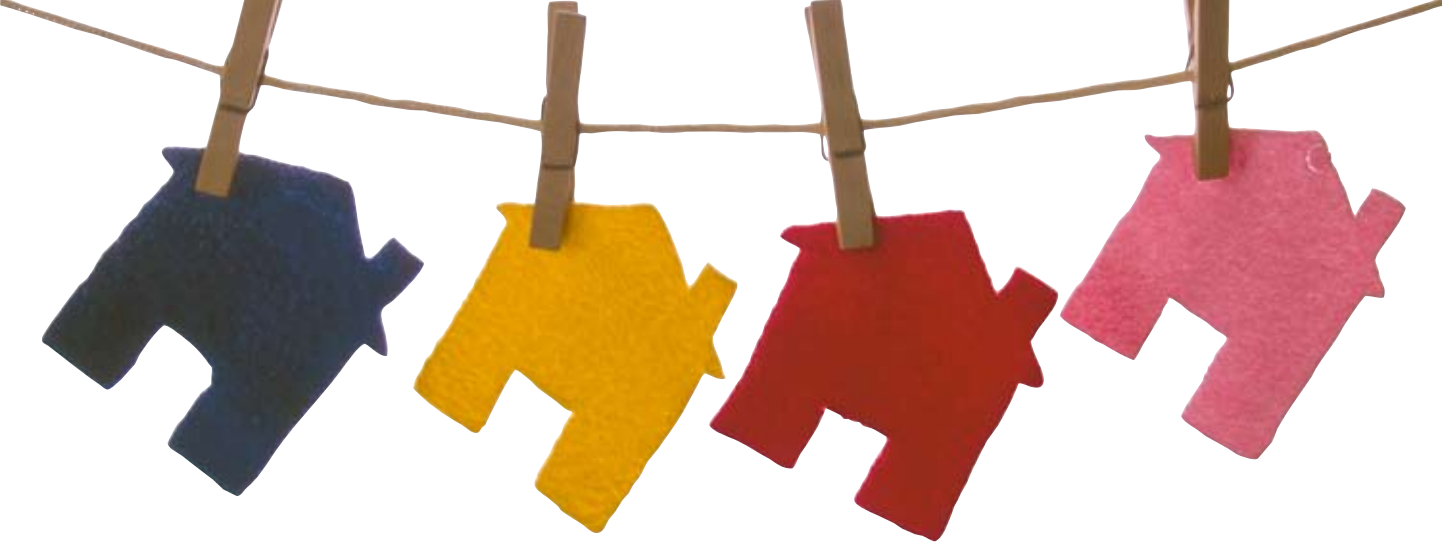
- ❖ **Amber Alert:** reports on child abductions. (Android, iPhone, iPod Touch)
- ❖ **CA locator:** directory of State government service centers and offices with maps. (iPhone, iPod Touch)
- ❖ **DMV Now:** (Department of Motor Vehicles) locations of field offices and wait times, instructional videos, and sample driving tests. (iPhone, iPod Touch)

Federal government

To view a complete list of offerings and download individual apps, visit apps.usa.gov.

Federal government entities have applications for iPhone, BlackBerry, and Android. In addition, many agencies offer mobile versions of their Web sites for easy access to commonly requested information. Here are some of the popular sites:

- ❖ **MyTSA:** airport security, real-time operating status of airports, and more; from the Transportation Security Administration. (iPhone and mobile Web)
- ❖ **Recalls.gov:** recall information about consumer products, cars, food, medicine, cosmetics, and other items. (Android and mobile Web)
- ❖ **U.S. Postal Service Tools:** (U.S. Postal Service) track a package, find a post office, look up a zip code, and more. (iPhone, mobile Web)
- ❖ **USA.gov Mobile:** access to Federal government Web sites. (mobile Web)
- ❖ **UV Index:** (Environmental Protection Agency) ultraviolet index forecast by zip code. (Android, BlackBerry, and mobile Web)



MONEY SMARTS

EVERYDAY FINANCIAL FACTS TO EDUCATE, EMPOWER, AND AMUSE

this edition: **HOME MORTGAGES**

Shopping for a home can be fun, but shopping for a home loan is another thing entirely. The process (and the paperwork) can be overwhelming. First, you have to know the lingo. Take our little quiz to see how much you know about home mortgage terminology. Then, check the resources for information and assistance.

1. WHAT IS AN ARM?

- a. Something you have to give the bank—along with a leg—to get a loan.
- b. A home loan with an interest rate that can change.
- c. A loan that can be “adjusted,” but not “fixed.”

2. WHAT IS A BALLOON PAYMENT?

- a. A lump-sum payment you owe when the loan term ends.
- b. The cost of decorations for a child’s birthday party.
- c. A promise to pay that’s full of hot air.

3. WHAT IS DEFAULT?

- a. Something that causes an earthquake.
- b. Failure to make your mortgage payments.
- c. Stepping over the line when you’re playing tennis.

4. WHAT IS ESCROW?

- a. A type of lettuce used in fancy restaurant salads.
- b. A neutral third party that holds your money until the deal is complete.
- c. A large, black bird that lives near an estuary.

5. WHAT IS PITI?

- a. The party you throw when you’re feeling sorry for yourself.
- b. What your friends feel when they see the clunker you drive.
- c. The four parts of your monthly mortgage payment: principal, interest, taxes, and insurance.

6. WHAT ARE POINTS?

- a. Something that goes with brownies.
- b. Part of a mortgage loan. Paying points will often get you a lower interest rate.
- c. How your credit score is calculated.

RESOURCES FOR THE REAL DEAL

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
www.hud.gov

has information on shopping for a loan, home buying programs, preventing foreclosure, and more.

Consult your phone directory for a local office in your area, or go online.

State of California Consumer Home Mortgage Information Web site
www.yourhome.ca.gov

has tips on purchasing a home, foreclosure prevention, avoiding mortgage scams, and more.

California Housing Finance Agency
www.calhfa.ca.gov

877.9CalHFA or 877.922.5432.
offers guidance and assistance for people buying their first home.

ANSWERS: 1. b; 2. a; 3. b; 4. b; 5. c; 6. b.

Department of Consumer Affairs
Office of Publications, Design & Editing
1625 N. Market Blvd., Suite N-112
Sacramento, CA 95834

CREDIT

OFFICE OF PUBLICATIONS, DESIGN & EDITING

HAZEL ALIG

ARIS BAJAR

JEAN BRICARELLO

LAUREL GODDARD

RAMONA GODOY

ALLEN GRIGG

LISA KINETZ

JIM PYERS

CAROL STOVER

RICARDO VILLANUEVA

JUNE VARGAS



ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER
GOVERNOR

BILL LEONARD
SECRETARY, STATE AND
CONSUMER SERVICES AGENCY

BRIAN J. STIGER
ACTING DIRECTOR, DEPARTMENT
OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS



2009 Winner



2009 Winner
2008 Winner



ACE Award 2009
ACE Award 2008



2008 Award
of Excellence



STATE INFORMATION
OFFICERS COUNCIL

2010 Silver Award
2009 Silver Award
2007 Gold Award